



Republic of Bulgaria
ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

RESOLUTION

ON

**"DRAFT STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING AND REDUCING THE
SHARE OF DROPOUTS AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS (2013-2020)"**

Sofia, April 2013

The President Board of the Economic and Social Council (ESC) decided to develop a **resolution** on the "**Draft Strategy for Preventing and Reducing the Share of Dropouts and Early School Leavers (2013-2020)**" developed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. Mrs. Yanka Takeva, ESC member of Group III "Other organizations", was appointed rapporteur on this resolution.

ESC President – Professor Dr. Lalko Dulevski submitted the draft resolution adopted by the President Board to the Plenary Session for discussion, which in turn adopted it on 26 April 2013.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Education is one of the main factors for the development of society and human capital and hence plays an important role in the present and the future of our country. ESC repeatedly stated that the education-related objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy are of crucial importance and therefore welcomes the fact that the European Commission (the Commission) presented in November 2012 the Communication "Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes."¹ ESC is content that a number of the proposals, expressed in its previously adopted acts, have been included in this document.
- 1.2. Early school leaving is a particularly acute problem for Bulgaria. It clearly entails serious economic, social and political consequences while outlining challenges to the labour market, the quality of the workforce, demographic changes and the social systems in Bulgaria.
- 1.3. In a series of acts ESC noted with concern that early school leaving is a leading factor for unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. There is no doubt that the lack of education and training in some young people is the reason for their increasing difficulty in finding employment and for the fact that they are systematically considered cheap and unwanted workforce.
- 1.4. The technological development and structural changes in modern industries lead to a permanent reduction in the number of jobs requiring lower qualifications. This trend in the labour market creates obstacles to the realisation of people with low level of education and compromises the competitiveness of the Bulgarian and European economies.
- 1.5. The poverty and exclusion experienced by dropouts or early school leavers have a lasting impact on their families and often generate new generations of uneducated and poor people. The increase in that segment of the population is a prerequisite for the deterioration of the political and social climate. Young people who lack employment and legal sources of income are potential victims to or participants in criminal activities, including trafficking in humans and drugs. They are easily manipulated, prone to selfish causes and political speculation, which creates risks for the democratic foundations and stability of society.
- 1.6. In 2012 ESC adopted an Opinion² on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving in Bulgaria. In it ESC presented an analysis of the problem, proposed measures for solving it and recommended the development of a national strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers to levels below 10%.

¹ EC Communication on "Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes," COM (2012) 669 Final.

² Opinion: "Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving", ESC/2/033/2012.

1.7. With this Resolution ESC joins the public discussion of the Draft National "Strategy for Preventing and Reducing the Share of Dropouts and Early School Leavers (2013-2020)" (the Strategy) in the belief that in order to overcome the negative trends it is necessary to undertake timely and immediate action, today, without further procrastination, because what is at stake is the present and future prosperity of our country.

2. MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. ESC welcomes the development of the Draft Strategy for Preventing and Reducing the Share of Dropouts and Early School Leavers (2013-2020) "as an important step in the successful achievement of our national target within the Europe 2020 Strategy that the share of early school leavers by 2020 should not exceed 11%."

2.2. A positive fact is that the Draft Strategy is consistent with a number European strategic documents and national programmes for the development of education and also corresponds to the objectives of the "National Development Programme Bulgaria 2020" in the area of education, employment and the fight against poverty.

2.3. ESC welcomes the actions taken so far to implement the specific measures and resources, including under the Operational Programmes as a result of which Bulgaria has achieved a decrease in the share of early school leavers by about 6% for the period 2005-2012 down to 12.5% against an EU-27 average of 12.9%.

2.4. ESC appreciates the fact that the Strategy takes into consideration the recommendations of the Council of the European Union³ concerning the definition for "early school leaver" which has been differentiated from the concept "dropout from school" used in the Bill on Preschool and School Education. ESC appreciates the fact that the two terms are delineated as a contribution to clarifying the nature of the problem.

2.5. ESC supports the vision of the Strategy and guiding principles for its implementation. Both the strategic goal and the operational targets, the implementation of which should yield concrete results, are clearly defined. At the same time, ESC recommends that the Strategy could be improved structurally – it can be clarified further and made more specific by listing the short- and long-term goals.

2.6. ESC believes that the Strategy correctly identifies the groups of causes for early school leaving – economic, social, educational, ethnic, cultural, institutional, and those related to the health status of children. At the same time, ESC finds that no structural analysis is provided and there is no differentiation of the causes and the gravity of the phenomena "dropouts from school" and "early school leavers".

2.7. ESC draws attention to the fact that the review of the main resources for reducing the share of early school leavers is presented more as an analytical report of all positive accomplishments in education over the recent years, occasionally showing unnecessary details that do not correspond to the strategic nature of the document. It is necessary to pay

³ Recommendation of the Council of the European Union (2011/C 191/01 of 28 June 2011), Official Journal of the European Union, Issue 191/1 of 1 July 2011.

closer attention to the existing weaknesses and possible obstacles to the implementation of the Strategy.

- 2.8. ESC calls for a closer analysis of the structure of early school leavers because while in the EU there is a tendency for children to drop out of school after acquiring primary education, in Bulgaria there is an alarmingly increasing share of children who never attended school or dropped out before completing any educational level. It is also necessary to take into account the specific nature of the social, economic and demographic problems that characterise education in the different regions of the country.
- 2.9. ESC has repeatedly noted in its acts that the key objectives of our education system should be the acquisition of key competences by young people, the diversification of the forms of training, validating the results of the overall training process in Bulgarian schools, and strong emphasis on prevention and intervention policies in the fight against early school leaving.
- 2.10. ESC is pleased to report that the key points made in the EC Communication "Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes" are at the heart of the policies set out in the Strategy and the key measures for prevention, intervention and compensation of the effects of early school leaving. According to ESC they will contribute to achieving the strategic and operational targets included in the Strategy.
- 2.11. ESC welcomes the innovative direction of the policies outlined in the Strategy to create a positive educational environment favourable for modern personal development. Thus, the duties and responsibilities are clearly defined as favouring the formation of social skills, civic competences and strengthening student self-government. The document envisions the creation of a multicultural environment, ensuring equal access to education for all children, as well as the provision of social and psychological support for children at risk, children with special educational needs, students repeating school years and those continuing their education abroad.
- 2.12. ESC evaluates as efficient and effective the pedagogical practices included in the Strategy, which have been approved over the years in Bulgarian schools, such as extracurricular activities according to students' interests, consultations, participation in educational projects, supporting various youth activities, etc. At the same time, ESC recommends expansion and further specification of the measures provided in the Strategy for the effective involvement of local authorities in municipal policies and the conforming teacher training in higher education institutions to the modern conditions and practices.
- 2.13. ESC welcomes the adopted approach to evaluating the outcomes of the Strategy and the impact of the implementation of its operational targets through the use of appropriate indicators. ESC believes that the selected indicators are measurable, yet, it would be appropriate to add more indicators for evaluating the results as well as indicators for reporting and tracking the outcomes with respect to specific groups of students with special educational needs.
- 2.14. ESC agrees that in order to develop and implement "integrated, comprehensive and effective policies to reduce the vulnerability of risk groups" it is necessary to continuously

research, analyse and systematise the specific reasons for their early leaving as well as developing special custodial measures for keeping children at school.

- 2.15. ESC draws the attention of the responsible institutions that the distinction, newly formulated in the Strategy, between the concepts of "early school leaving" and "dropping out from school" should now be correlated qualitatively to the statistical data collected and published by the National Statistical Institute (NSI).
- 2.16. ESC expresses its satisfaction with the introduction of the Information System for Education – "ADMIN"⁴ and believes that through further expansion of the scope of the system and following the timely registration of all schools and kindergartens, it will also prove useful for the prevention and monitoring of early dropping out and early school leaving.
- 2.17. ESC welcomes the decision that the Strategy should use a coordination mechanism for its implementation, which involves not only people employed in the education system and its institutions but also people from all state and municipal authorities and organisations, responsible for the provision of better material, financial and social protection for the children. At the same time ESC recommends that an integrated institutional approach should be applied in the establishment of this mechanism – effective control should be exercised and full transparency should be provided at all levels concerning the indicators used to measure its results and impact.
- 2.18. ESC calls for more attention to existing weaknesses and possible obstacles in the implementation of the Strategy. Therefore, ESC recommends that the funding of the Strategy should be planned and programmed for the whole period by 2020, earmarking specific financial resources from the state budget and EU funds for the next programming period 2014-2020. This is the only way to ensure effective implementation of the policies and measures laid down in the Strategy.
- 2.19. ESC welcomes the decision of the Bulgarian government during the next programming period to develop an Operational Programme (OP) "Research and Education for Smart Growth" and believes that the resources earmarked for the priorities "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" and "Promoting Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning" will contribute to achieving the objectives of this Strategy.
- 2.20. ESC notes with concern that the delayed adoption of a number of Bills that were completed during the previous year, the Draft Children Act, the Draft Preschool and School Education Act, and the Draft Vocational Education and Training Act, can become a significant challenge to the full implementation of the Strategy and the estimated plan for its implementation.
- 2.21. Moreover, both primary and secondary Bulgarian legislation regulating school education will have to undergo revision in order to be brought in line with the recently adopted national and European strategic documents in the area of education. In this regard, ESC appeals that the Draft Children Act, the Draft Preschool and School Education Act, and the

⁴ <http://www.adminpro-bg.com/ws/index.html>

Draft Vocational Education and Training Act should be among the top priorities of the new 42nd National Assembly.

- 2.22. ESC recommends the inclusion of the social partners at both the national and the local level in the process of planning, monitoring, implementing and evaluating the implementation of the Strategy, which would contribute to its greater transparency and objectivity.

3. IT IS NECESSARY TO ANALYSE MORE PROFOUNDLY THE CAUSES FOR DROPPING OUT FROM THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN BULGARIA

- 3.1. ESC acknowledges that the Strategy correctly defines the causes for early school leaving, yet there is lack of a structural analysis and differentiation of the causes and the gravity of the phenomena "dropping out from school" and "early school leaving".
- 3.2. In its Opinion on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving,⁵ based on a survey of the opinions of a large number of educators and experts, ESC concluded that dropouts and early school leavers are a non-homogenous group and the reasons for their non-participation in the education system are diverse and unevenly distributed across different regions.
- 3.3. According to ESC a significant role in dropping out from school and early school leaving is played by economic reasons, connected with poverty, parental unemployment and a low living standard, which dooms the children to marginalisation (especially in groups and families such as those living in the Roma slums). Due to economic reasons, there are children in a number of families in Bulgaria who remain outside the educational system and in practice grow up totally illiterate. In some cases, this is a prerequisite for children to be used by their parents as a source of income.
- 3.4. Equally important for the emergence and deepening of the problem of dropping out from the education system in Bulgaria are several types of social causes connected with the relations within the family and the migratory behaviour of the family. This group includes most of the "problem students", who are often left without custody following the emigration of their parents, their parents' lack of interest or low literacy.
- 3.5. ESC believes that a particularly risky group are the so called "occasional" students – children who attend school 1-2 times per week, only to receive "an attendance note" and prevent the termination of their parents' social allowances.
- 3.6. ESC also notes the importance of ethnic and cultural causes, related to the socialisation of certain value orientations which also impact in specific ways the attitude to education. What should be taken in considerations is also the so called "young female" profile of dropouts because this reflects important traits of the overall stereotype and lifestyle of an ethnic

⁵ ESC Opinion on "Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving."

community. The problem is the most acute among Roma children, but also exists among the members of other ethnic groups in Bulgaria.

3.7. Often the health status of children is a serious cause for early school leaving. ESC reports that the common educational framework of the integrative learning environment in schools lacks the policies necessary for accommodating children with physical, mental and sensory disabilities and keeping them at school. In this regard, ESC calls for steps to consider and adopt adequate measures for resource, material and technical support to ensure equal access to education and the acquisition of professional qualification for children and young people with disabilities.

3.8. ESC agrees that in order to develop and implement an "integrated, comprehensive and effective policies to reduce the vulnerability of risk groups" it is necessary to perform in-depth research, analysis and systematisation of the specific causes for dropping out and early school leaving, as well as identifying measures for keeping children at school and for their successful reintegration.

3.8.1. Each year different age cohorts fall in the scope of the indicator "early school leavers".⁶ In academic year 2010/2011 67% of early school leavers left school before completing grade VIII. Even more alarming is the fact that for the last 10 years an average of 2.5% of early school leavers drop out before completing grade IV, i.e. without receiving the minimum knowledge of the Bulgarian language and mathematics, and completely devoid of any knowledge in the sciences, foreign languages, information and communication technologies, etc.⁷

3.8.2. In this regard, ESC proposes the inclusion in the Strategy of a specific long-term goal of significantly reducing the share of students leaving school between grades I and IV, according to which their number should not exceed 1.5% of the total number of students enrolled during the respective school year. By monitoring this indicator and developing specific measures for the reintegration of such students it is possible to prevent the long-term negative effect of leaving school at a very early age.

3.8.3. ESC notes that another worrying factor for early school leaving is the declining "net enrolment rate of the population."⁸ The last 5 years (from 2007 to 2012 school years) show a decrease in this indicator among children aged 7-10 and 11-14, i.e. among adults before completing grade VIII.

3.8.4. Statistics show that the educational system now covers 94.62% of the children aged 7-10, while in previous years it covered nearly 100% (99.56%) of the population in this age group. Those unenrolled in school today will be statistically accounted as "early school leavers" in less than 10 years. This can create a problem for the implementation of the

⁶ Eurostat defines the indicator "early school leavers" as follows: the percentage of the population aged 18-24 having attained at most lower secondary education and not being involved in further education or training (ISCED 0-2).

⁷ According to the National Statistical Institute data.

⁸ The ratio between the students enrolled in the beginning of the school year in a particular age group and the total number of population in the same age group.

national targets from the National Reform Programme (NRP), which state that "the share of early school leavers by 2020 should not exceed 11%."

3.8.5. According to ESC, special attention should be paid to the degree of the inclusion of children aged 7-10 in the education system. A deeper analysis is needed of the causes for the situation of every child that is not enrolled in first grade of each respective year. Determining the character of such causes will help identifying the measures for increasing the coverage of the education system.

3.8.6. ESC finds a slowdown in reducing the share of early school leavers, which must be analysed in relation to the implementation of the aforesaid national goal. For 2012 the slowdown is 0.3 percentage points (a decrease from 12.8% to 12.5%), while in 2010 and 2011 this decrease is respectively 0.8 percentage points and 1.1 percentage points.

3.9. ESC believes that it would be appropriate to include in the Strategy several additional indicators to measure the outcomes of the individual operational targets, such as an indicator for the number of students involved in extracurricular, out-of-school and creative activities. It is also possible to add indicators for assessing the impact of the overall Strategy, such as the share of students covered by all-day schooling, or the share of the population aged 5-18 included in compulsory pre-school and school education.

3.10. In view of the need to identify children and students at risk of dropping out, the ESC proposes to add indicators reflecting the number of students with special educational needs integrated into mainstream education, the number of children from ethnic groups integrated in the educational system, as well as the number of children with deviant behaviour and children at risk, who are reintegrated into the education system. It would also be useful to introduce a relevant impact indicator, which would take into account the share of children and young people provided with equal access to education.

4. FURTHER POLICIES AND MEASURES ARE NEEDED TO PREVENT EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

4.1. ESC acknowledges that the policies and measures for prevention, intervention and compensation laid down in the Strategy will contribute to the achievement of its strategic and operational targets. When applied together early on they can build a solid foundation for developing the learning potential of children and could form a basis for better integration in schools.

4.2. Taking into account the consultations with educators and managers in the education sector made in the course of preparation of this resolution, ESC proposes some specific measures that would improve the prevention and the timely intervention in case of early school leaving.

4.2.1. According to ESC, the Strategy accurately notes that the involvement of parents is a crucial first step in combating early school leaving. At the same time, ESC believes that it is appropriate to provide for the creation of a sustainable network of social institutions that

can engage in the development and construction of a healthy, supportive environment for early detection of the problem and intervention. This is very important for regions where representatives of the minority groups in Bulgaria live in isolation.

4.2.2. ESC recommends considering a mechanism for supporting students with so-called "problem" parents. These are the children of unemployed, discouraged, often addicted to alcohol, people who are not looking for work, not registered with the labour offices, and often do not have IDs. These students could be identified by institutional committees, which can evaluate their situation on a case by case basis and recommend the granting of social fellowships, free food, clothes, transport cards, support for participation in extracurricular activities, etc.

4.2.3. ESC recommends the creation of a specific algorithm for "school - parent" interaction designed for situations when a student at risk is identified. It should lay down the specific duties of the form tutor, the principal, the school psychologist, the social educator, etc. Otherwise there is a risk that the recommendation for a greater involvement in the prevention of early school leaving may remain within the domain of good intentions.

4.2.4. In order to achieve a greater involvement from the tutors with the children and families at risk, ESC proposes to consider reducing their teaching load. Since social pedagogues are trained to provide individual work for preventing early school leaving, ESC proposes that the profession "social pedagogue" should be regulated and included in the official list of professional qualifications in Bulgaria.

- 4.3. Although the Strategy notes the need to increase the diversity and the effectiveness of the instruments and incentives aimed at attracting students to education and training, ESC believes the document should include specific recommendations concerning the necessary update of school teacher training. During their course of higher education training school teachers should be prepared to use modern motivational techniques and approaches for working with children at risk. Teachers need to know the best practices for working with students at risk of dropping out, special skills for identifying the particular set of problems of each individual student and creating a personalised plan for overcoming them.
- 4.4. Since the work on the prevention of early school leaving and the implementation of measures to reintegrate children into the education system require specific efforts, especially when dealing with certain ethnic groups, ESC recommends that the labour of educators who specialise in this area should receive higher remuneration.
- 4.5. ESC reports with concern that in Bulgaria there is still a lack of necessary coordination between the actions of local authorities, the Social assistance directorates, kindergartens and schools. In this regard, ESC recommends that out-of-school networks should be created, on the initiative of schools, involving regional departments responsible for youth policies of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Education and Science, social services, etc.
- 4.6. ESC welcomes the idea to use European funding for creating modern professional and career centres at the schools or at the municipalities, which should offer flexible educational models (combining professional training and practice) to young people aged

18 and above as a measure of prevention and compensation.

- 4.7. ESC proposes that young people who have dropped out from the education system to be timely reintegrated and prioritatively included in training programmes for the acquisition of key professional competences and qualifications. Their inclusion in the programmes for temporary employment within projects funded by the national budget and under OP "Human Resources Development" should be made conditional to their engagement in evening or part-time education or training.

5. IT IS NECESSARY TO COLLECT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DROPPING OUT FROM SCHOOL AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND ACHIEVE BETTER COORDINATION WHILE IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

- 5.1. The information related to dropping out from school and early school leaving in Bulgaria is collected and presented by various institutions – mainly by the National Statistical Institute and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. The availability of accurate and complete information is essential for the effective implementation of the Strategy because the results of the policies and the envisaged measures should be continuously studied, analysed and systematised, so that the magnitude and the specific causes for the problem can be accurately traced.

- 5.2. In this regard, ESC recommends the creation of a unified national database which would bring together the information collected by all organisations and institutions. In its previous Opinion⁹ the ESC proposed the introduction of "a unified educational number" for each child which would allow tracing the development of each individual from kindergarten to graduation of each respective level of education. This will enable competent authorities to keep precise account of the specific social, economic and demographic problems related to education in different regions of the country.

- 5.3. Accessibility to such a database will allow more in-depth study of the structure of school leavers and help to identify adequate and effective policies and early intervention measures at the level of the district, the municipality, the town and even the individual school in order to prevent early school leaving.

5.3.1. As mentioned above, according to ESC, policies relating to prevention are of crucial importance in Bulgaria because unlike in the rest of EU, where as a whole it is more typical for children to drop out of school after they have acquired elementary education, in our country there is a clear tendency for children to either never attend school or to drop out before acquiring primary education.

5.3.2. Measures aimed at reintegrating children in the education system (intervention and compensation) by which individuals are given a second chance to finish high school, have a strong potential to prevent students from falling into the category "early school leavers". Tracking the achievements of young people who have been reintegrated into the education and training system at least to completing secondary education will help to refine the

⁹ Opinion: "Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving", ESC/2/033/2012

"intervention" and "compensation" measures, which are generally less effective than "prevention" measures.

- 5.4. ESC notes that the distinction made in the Strategy between "drop outs" and "early school leavers" should be related to the statistical data collected and published by the National Statistical Institute. This requires reformulating the name of some of the indicators presented by NSI, such as the replacement of "drop outs" with "early school leavers", etc.
- 5.5. ESC expresses its satisfaction with the introduction of the information system "ADMIN"¹⁰ for the purposes of education and believes that it may be used for monitoring and preventing dropping out and early school leaving. After the introduction of some adequate additions the "ADMIN" system may be used for monitoring the "school migration" of young people who are expelled or moved from one school to another as well as the reasons for this which may be related to class discipline, migration and antisocial behaviour, etc.
- 5.6. Given the importance of early school leaving to society, ESC proposes to widen the access to the data generated by the "ADMIN" information system. Having accurate and up-to-date information, the structures of public administration, organised civil society, NGOs, etc. will be able to better monitor and control the processes in the education system. The possibilities for analysing trends and timely identification of emerging challenges and obstacles will also be improved.
- 5.7. According to the ESC, it is necessary that each school should identify and train a special employee who will assume responsibility for the timely and accurate administration of the data entered in the "ADMIN" system.
- 5.8. ESC welcomes the coordination mechanism laid down in the Strategy to ensure its proper implementation. It must engage not only the education system and its institutions, but also all state and municipal authorities and organisations responsible for the provision of better material, financial and social protection of the children.
- 5.9. ESC recommends strengthening the coordination between the actions of local authorities, social services and educational institutions. To ensure the coordination of the Strategy's implementation it is necessary to flank the integrated institutional approach with an effective control mechanism at all levels which would involve appropriate indicators for measuring its outcomes and impact.
- 5.10. ESC believes that the involvement of the social partners at the national and the local level in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy's implementation would aid the achievement of greater transparency.

6. IT IS NECESSARY TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING ON THE LABOUR MARKET AND THE SOCIAL SYSTEMS

- 6.1. In its previous Opinions ESC noted that the problem of early school leaving is very acute because of both its educational and socio-economic consequences. All these consequences

¹⁰ <http://www.adminpro-bg.com/ws/index.html>

directly impact employment, the quality of the workforce, social integration and the upbringing of future generations. The low level of education and qualification entail not only unemployment, but also poverty and social exclusion – a vicious circle which is difficult to transcend.

- 6.2. Technological advancement, globalization and the global financial and economic crisis contribute to reduction in the number of low-skilled jobs today. Conversely, in its acts ESC also finds that the restructuring of the labour market and the decreasing number of jobs for people with low education and qualification creates a number of serious challenges not only for individuals but also for society and public finances at large. The lack of employment leads to long-term dependence on social benefits and allowances.
- 6.3. ESC believes that a crucial dimension of the policies for reducing dropping out of school early school leaving is that they should be combined with employment policies and measures. If they are not controlled on time, the negative tendencies of dropping out of school and early school leaving may lead to serious negative consequences for the labour market in the future.
- 6.4. ESC believes that if the observed trends remain unchanged, an imbalance should be expected between the considerable supply of workforce with low qualification and the very narrow demand of such labour in the country. The increase in this imbalance may lead to further problems on the labour market, more pressure on the social systems, as well as intensifying outgoing migration.
- 6.5. In this regard, ESC proposes that the target for reducing early school leaving should be monitored in close connection with the situation of workers with primary or lower education on the labour market and their impact on public finances and social systems in the country. Furthermore, ESC proposes that a preliminary evaluation of the performance on the main objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy should be made within the European Semester in 2013 and the possibilities for supplementing some of them with additional targets and monitoring indicators should be discussed.

In conclusion, ESC once again emphasises that reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers is a key national priority with very serious economic, social and political consequences for the future of the country. ESC evaluates the developed draft Strategy as an important step to solving this problem and states its readiness to participate actively in the consultation process on the key issue for our country – improving the level of education and the human capital of the nation.

Prof. Lalko Dulevski, Ph.D

PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL